

The World's Luckiest Man

In case you missed it, an on-line survey was recently conducted in order to crown the World's Fittest Man. And the winner? Santa Claus. I kid you not. I read it on the internet, so it must be true. And, after a few head-scratching moments, I had to concede that St. Nick was definitely worthy of the title. I mean, can you think of anyone else who has done what he has, and for so long?

How *does* Santa do it? The guy hardly seems the physical specimen, and yet each year at around this time he summons the strength and agility of a man a fraction of his age to deliver gifts to children around the world, and all in one night no less. As far as I know, Christmas has never been cancelled due to complaints of aching muscles or stiff joints. I'm almost inclined to believe the rumours that Santa's elves are all registered massage therapists on the side. However you measure it, the guy's a stud.

I should adopt whatever fitness regimen The Big Guy is on. On most mornings my body rebels against the idea that movement is about to occur. Once I manage to get out of bed and upright (or mostly upright), I take inventory of the areas of greatest complaint. My "regulars" have lately included vertebrae that have grown estranged from one another, a left knee that swells mysteriously overnight and hips that have decided that rotating is vastly overrated. I'll bet that Santa almost never experiences these mundane afflictions. And if he does, Mrs. Claus is certainly not telling.

However, before I resign myself to the lowest rungs of the fitness ladder, I will acknowledge that my physical issues are not due to sloth; quite the opposite, in fact. After three years of rehabilitation from injury, I have returned to my first love. I am speaking of tennis. Unfortunately, my body has challenged my decision to once again serve and volley by mounting a succession of physical roadblocks. It has apparently decided that it prefers the "less is more" approach to activity and has attempted to thwart my resurrection at every turn. There are days when I feel like I will never reach my goal of pain-free tennis. But lately, when even the simplest bend to retrieve a ball causes me to grimace, I think: "what would Santa do?" I know that the World's Fittest Man would not permit pedestrian

complaints to deter him from his objective. And so I press on.

Santa may have his talented elves to help ease what ails him, but I think that I may possess the next best thing: I have yoga. No matter how twisted and misshapen I am when I arrive at my yoga class, I leave an hour or so later noticeably more limber and several years younger (at least I *feel* several years younger). While it hasn't exactly managed to turn back my chronological clock, yoga has seemed to slow it down. I believe that I would never have been able to return to tennis without the restorative powers of yoga. If Santa decided to practice yoga, he might be able to retain the World's Fittest Man title for many years to come. No one would be able to touch him.

The ability to play tennis again after believing for so long that it could never happen has been a tremendous gift and a blessing. It doesn't matter if I leave the court victorious or vanquished. On some days, everything works and I feel like my feet barely touch the ground. On others, everything hurts and I feel as if I am in playing in quicksand. But no matter the outcome, I am grateful for the second chance that I have been offered and the smile on my face as I walk off the court gives it away every time. I will grudgingly accept my aches and pains as the price of admission to an event that I am privileged to attend. And yoga will help to keep me coming back to that which I love.

Santa Claus may be the World's Fittest Man, but I am definitely the luckiest. Even when my vertebrae aren't on speaking terms.

David



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Possibilities

Winter 2012/13

Back to the Future this Christmas

If you have seen all three *Back to the Future* movies, you will undoubtedly agree that the stinker of the bunch was Part II. That's the one in which they travel to the future and learn of the mess they have made with this whole time continuum thing.

It's not surprising that the future based version is the least popular. Given the choice of where we would travel in a time-machine, almost everyone would go backwards. Many would pick a historical moment in time. I, for example, would love to attend a performance of one of Shakespeare's plays in late 1400's London, with Shakespeare himself in the house.

But this time of year reveals another reason we have a bias to traveling backwards in time – to relive fond memories of our own childhood. The Christmas season draws us irresistibly into our past.

When it comes to Christmas, time almost stands still. We listen to the same Christmas songs, sung by current artists perhaps, but still the same familiar tune that we have listened to our entire lives. We decorate in the same way as years gone by, pulling the old decorations out of the basement and dusting them off for one more go. We gather with family and enjoy the same meal year after year. We watch the same movies, or versions of the same movies that our parents watched before we were born. We call these things "traditions of the season," and protect them dearly. And so, when change is introduced, we resist.



Baysville circa 1970

When I was still quite young my family decided to do something different – we were going to spend Christmas with my grandma, in Baysville. My two older sisters, for reasons that I can't recall, weren't coming with us. It was sold to my younger siblings, and myself, as a chance to be in Muskoka for the holiday. Enjoy the great outdoors. Baysville had a least twice as much snow as we had, so we would be able to get out and do some serious tobogganing, and build snow-forts and snowmen. We always enjoyed Baysville in the summer (this was true) so we would no doubt enjoy it in the winter.

I could easily be sold on all of this – but not on Christmas Day. For my entire life, Christmas happened in exactly the same place, and in pretty much the same

way. Christmas Eve we prepared for Santa, staking out our place in the living room, and hanging our stocking for Santa to drop his gifts specifically for us. Our house was a hub of activity, with relatives dropping in for some Christmas cheer. On Christmas morning we woke before dawn, and by the time daylight arrived, our family was ALL together. On Christmas afternoon more relatives would drop in, and everyone would be smiling and joking and having a wonderful time.

It couldn't be the same in Baysville. I wouldn't be sleeping in my own room. No relatives would drop in to visit us. My big sisters wouldn't be there. I couldn't call my friends to tell them what I got. It wouldn't be the same, and hence in my mind, it wouldn't be Christmas. Not to mention the worry that Santa might not even know where we were!

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Back to the Future this Christmas (Cont'd)

Despite my resistance, we packed the car and headed to Baysville on the morning of Christmas Eve. The snow was indeed deeper, which intensified the feeling of being isolated from the rest of the world, a world that was no doubt celebrating Christmas as they were supposed to be – at home.

You will be happy to know that Santa found us. In fact, of all the Christmases of my childhood, this is the only one in which I can recall with a high degree of certainty what Santa brought me: a chess set. It was an impressive chess set. The white pieces were carved from a soft ivory coloured soapstone-like material and felt good in my hands. The dark pieces were carved from wood. The detail was impressive. I have that chess set to this day. It may be the only gift from Santa that I can say that about. The chess set made me feel smart and mature. Santa was pointing out that it was time for me to give up on toy trucks and children's stories. It was time for me to become a grown up.

Of course you may have guessed, that while I didn't want to admit it (partly for the sake of my younger brother and sister, but mostly because I didn't really want to grow up with respect to Christmas) I knew that Santa was my mom and dad. And that made the inferences of this gift even more important, and more serious. I felt as though the magic of Christmas was giving way to the realities of life.

I know that my father was happy that Christmas we spent in his childhood home. He was with his mom for the first time in years, and in the home where he used to go to sleep hoping that Santa might stop by. He had often told us stories of growing up literally in a log cabin in the woods, but the one that has always stuck with me is the story of Santa bringing him a toy truck filled with candy. It was at the end of his bed when he woke up on Christmas morning, along with a skiff of snow as the story goes. So, while I was clearly out of my element that year, my father had returned to his. He travelled back in time. I couldn't possibly have understood that at the time. But I do now.

We never returned to Baysville for Christmas. But

in future years I would return to my home on Frederick Street in Bradford many times with our young family. And each time I would re-live the precious memories of my youth, and feel the tingle of believing in magic once again.

And so I have a new item for my Christmas list for Santa this year. I would like a DeLorean, retrofitted to work as a time machine. I will travel back to 1963 and watch Christmas morning unfold through the eyes of my own 6-year old self. And I will find a moment to speak with my dad, who will no doubt recognize me as a slightly older version of himself. I will let him know that I wished we had spent more Christmas days in Baysville. And then I will ask him to take a trip with me back to the future. I want to show him that what he and Mom started all those years ago, has turned out pretty well.

My wish for each of you is a timeless holiday season filled with fond memories, new memorable moments...and magic.

Bill



Our food drive continues!



Thanks largely to the efforts of Nick, our food drive is gathering steam, as you can see by the donations piling up under the Christmas tree here at the office. It's not too late to help us out. If you are coming to the office, please bring a non-perishable food item, or drop by your local Daily Food Bank to make the donation there. Help us provide food to needy families in our area to help them celebrate the season! Thanks for your support.

Southlake Festival of Trees

We are pleased to be participating once again in the Southlake Festival of Trees at the Upper Canada Mall in Newmarket. This is the third year for this successful fundraising (and spirit raising) activity run in support of Southlake Regional Health Centre. The decorating crew did a fabulous job once again in making our tree look truly spectacular. If you are in the mall this holiday season, be sure to wander through the magical forest of Christmas trees on display. And vote for our tree! (You can also

vote on-line – go to www.Southlakefoundation.ca/FOT to see more photos and register your vote.)



Great Minds, Great Thoughts

"I will honour Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all year."

Charles Dickens

"There's nothing sadder in this world than to wake Christmas morning and not be a child."

Erma Bombeck

"I stopped believing in Santa Claus when I was six. Mother took me to see him in a department store and he asked for my autograph."

Shirley Temple

"Man is made by his belief. As he believes, so is he."

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe